

Benefit of ‘AGNI’ (FIRE) in Various socio-cultural rituals

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Introduction:-

Names of 37 agni figure in vedas and sutragranthas. They are:-

Pavakah, marutah, chandramasah, shobhanah, mangalah, pragalbhah, parthivah, shuchih, sabhyah, samudbhavah, suryah, agnih, vaisvanarah, yojakah, shikhi, dhrtih, bhavah, brahma, dakshinagnih, ishvarah, vishnuh, vahnih, hutashanah, vidhih, sahasah, havyavahah, kavyavahanah, mrudah, varadah, baladah, krodhah, kamadah, dutakah, jataragnih, kravyadah, vadrah and samvartakah.

All these agnis play important roles in major KARMAs performed during the human lifetime:- garbhadana, pumsavana, simanta, jatakarma, namakarana, annaprasana, chudakarana, vrtopanayana, godana, kesanta, samavartana, vivaha, chaturthikarma, oupasana, garhapatya, srowtayajna, lakshahomah, kotihomah, prayaschittah, pakayajnah, shraddhah, purnahutih, shantikarmah, poushnikakarmah, aabhichaarakarmah, vasyakarmah, vanadahah, udarah, shavadaahah and pralaya. An attempt is made here to enunciate which agni is applicable where, the reasons for it and their benefits. We shall discuss the principles and processes ordained by the creator, for the benefit of mankind.

What is the necessity of giving different names to the same fire? In Vedic texts, names are not given arbitrarily, but to indicate classification of one general principle into various components through a proper method of nomenclature based on their functions (कर्मभ्यो नाम जायते).

Naming a child has important psychological implications that has been proved through various studies. Generally, nine parameters are used for nomenclature. These are: 1)place of origin, 2)interactive potential, 3)physical characteristics, 4)beneficence, 5)description of its characteristics in totality, 6)complementarity potential, 7)affection, 8)conjugation, 9)heredity or heritage (निवासात्कर्मणोरूपान्मङ्गलादत्वा च आशिषः | यद्यच्छयोपवसनात्तथामुष्यायणाच्च यत्). These principles have been used in naming AGNIs also.

Any perception requires motion (रजसा उद्धाटितम्) and all motion generates heat. The creation of the universe started with a motion (big bang or big bounce). Agni is regarded as the first of the perceived substances after creation and hence called the fore-born (अग्रणीभवति- Yaska Niruktam). Also, temperature threshold is the first necessary condition for transition state of any chemical interaction (अग्रं यज्ञेषु प्रणीयते- णीडप्रापणे). According to Rigveda 6-69-8, the whole of

creation in its various aspects of perception, physical characteristics and interactive potential (त्रेधा साहस्री- इमे वेदाः इमे लोकाः अथ वागिति *Itareyaranyakam*) came into being after the outward motion (*Gatih*) from the center of mass of a system (मध्ये प्राणः) represented by *INDRA* (स योऽयं मध्ये प्राणः एष एवेन्द्रः – Satapathabrahmana 6-1-1-2) and the corresponding inward motion (आगति) represented by *VISHNU* (वेवेष्टि व्याप्नोति विश्वं यः - विष्णुं व्याप्तौ, वेष्टि सिञ्चति आप्यायते विश्वमिति वा - विष्णुं सेचने, विश्वति सर्वभूतानि अत्रेति वा- विष्णुं प्रवेशने) tried to dominate (यदपस्पृधेथाम्) each other to break the equi-energy state (स्थितिः) represented by *BRAHMA* (ब्रह्म वै सर्वस्य प्रतिष्ठा - ब्रह्म वै सर्वस्य प्रथमजम्). While unhindered pure *GATI* and pure *AAGATI* are known as *INDRA* and *VISHNU* respectively, the same moving through the equilibrium point (thus, getting modified) are known as *AGNIH* ("स नः पितेव सूनवेऽग्नेसुपायनो भव॥" Rigveda-1.1.9) and *SOMA* respectively. Based on their degree of deflection (scattering angle), *AGNIH* exhibits different effects. These are characterized by giving them different names.

The common fire used by humans is called '*PAAVAKAH*'. It literally means that which purifies (पुनातीति). Since fire burns the impurities and purifies everything, it is so-called. It is known that during the fertile period, internal temperature of the female body rises than other days and it is the highest during the day of conception. The heat necessary for such application (fertilization) is called '*MAARUTAH*'. It is known that in humans, each cell normally contains 23 pairs of chromosomes, making a total of 46 chromosomes that are passed from parents to offspring. Each chromosome is made of protein and a single molecule of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) which contains the specific instructions that make each type of living creature unique. Of the 49 types of *MARUT* (मरुत् – म्रियते प्राणी यस्याभावात् - मुड्प्राणत्यागे), the first, the middle and the last are not considered as their effect is generalized and not perceptible individually. The rest 46 are responsible for creating the 46 chromosomes. Since they are responsible for creating life, they are collectively so named.

The 23rd pair of chromosomes are two special chromosomes, X and Y, that determine sex of the child. Those desiring a male child can follow the technique called '*Punsavanam*' (पुमासंसूतेऽनेनेति), by which process, one X chromosome is converted into a Y chromosome. The heat principle necessary for such transformation is called '*CHANDRAMASAH*', because it causes desired changes by modifying the confinement within the genes (चर्दि आहलादे दीप्तौ च).

The Y chromosome carries a special gene called *SRYM* which acts on another gene called *SOX9* to start the development of testes in the embryo. High levels of *SOX9* gene are required for normal testes development. If there is some disruption to *SOX9* activity, and only low levels are present, then the testes will not develop resulting in a baby with a disorder of sex development. To remove this possibility, a special ritual during '*Punsavanam*', called '*Sungakarma*' is performed, where the medication is prepared and applied to develop *SOX9* genes. The heat principle

necessary for such application is called *SHOBHANAH*. It is because, it gives the desired result of ensuring a healthy baby (शुभ्मं दीप्तौ).

During the sixth or the eighth months of the first pregnancy, a special application with medication called ‘*Seemantah*’ is performed for properly settling the bones and other joints of the baby in the womb (अयमूर्जावतो वृक्ष उर्जाव फलिनी भव). This is not to be repeated in subsequent pregnancies. The heat principle necessary for such application is called *MANGALAH* because of its beneficence. The heat principle necessary during delivery is called *PRAGALBHAH*, because of the motion involved during delivery, also because it holds the life support system during delivery (गल्भै धार्ढर्ये).

Any name is given after considering one or more of nine factors as described earlier. The heat principle necessary during such naming ceremony is called *PARTHIVAH*, because it describes the mortal body of the child. During the sixth or eighth month of the new-born male child and fifth or seventh month of the female child, first specially cooked food is given to develop their speech potential in the desired manner (देवीं वाचमजनयन्तदेवास्ताँविश्वरूपाः पश्वो वदन्ति। सा नो मन्द्रेषमूर्ज दुहाना धेनुर्वागस्मानुपसुष्टुतै तु). It is called ‘*Annaprasanam*’. The word ‘*Annam*’ (अऽद्यं भक्षणे) here means not only food but whatever goes into our system. The heat principle necessary during such ceremony is called *SUCHIH*, which is associated with radiation (दूयौः स्थानीय अग्निः).

The word गौः (गो) in the Vedas is used for the source of the ever wandering radiations that originate along with the gluons (माता रुद्राणां दुहिता वसूनां स्वसादित्यानाममृतस्य नाभिः। Rigveda 8.101.15). The cows and bullocks are also called गो, because they inherently have this wandering propensity (गच्छतीति गच्छत्यनेनेति वा), are used for pulling carts (यानसाधनम्) and gifting of cows is believed to uplift one’s soul (स्वर्गगमनसाधनम्). ‘*Godanam*’ does not only mean gifting away cows. It is also a process to get rid of unwanted radiation affecting a person (दानं अवृखण्डने). Since Sun contains short-wave, near-infrared (heat), and ultraviolet part of the electromagnetic spectrum that affect us differently, the heat principle connected to this process is called ‘*SURYAH*’.

After one year and before 3 years, the hair of the child is cut using scissors (अथातस्तृतीयेर्वर्षं चूडाकरणम्). Sharp razor is avoided. This ceremony is done according to family tradition and is called ‘*Chudakaranam*’. Between 16th and 17th year, the head and the beard is shaved. This is called ‘*Keshantah*’ (केशश्मशिविति च केशान्ते). The razor is heated up and sharpened using normal fire (येनावप्तसविता ...). Hence, the heat principle associated with it is called the general *AGNIH*.

After the education is complete, when the student returns from the *Gurukulam* (*Brahmacharyasramah*) to enter the family life (*Grihasthasramah*), they give up their attire and settle their own fire place. Since, this fire is settled (न र – रहिँ गतौ) and acts as the source for all other types of heat principles (converted into different types as per requirement), it is called *VAISWANARAH* (विश्वशासौ नरश्चेति). In Vedic times, this was not normal fire, but a generator that could be used to supply necessary heat for different applications. For this purpose, Sankhayanabrahmanam-1.1 says: रेतः सिक्तिर्वा अग्न्याधेयम् रेतःसिद्ध्यतेऽभिरूपा भवन्ति यद्यज्ञेभिरूपं तत्समृद्धम्.

Marriages in *Santana dharma* is just not a legally or formally recognized union between a man and a woman as partners in a personal relationship. It is a union between two souls, who complement each other to lead life together to make life meaningful. Hence, a married couple is called '*Dampatee*' joint owner of the household. Together, they constitute one unit to carry out different responsibilities connected with the household. Hence, their union is called '*Vivahah*'.(विशिष्टं वहनम्) – sharing of special responsibility. For this, both the husband and the wife take a vow in front of the sacred fire, to accept each other totally and remain faithful to each other throughout life. For this fusion of souls, the fire is called '*YOJAKAH*'. It may be noted that fusion leads to release of energy. Hence, the couple fight with each other – not to separate, but only to remain united more closely.

In our culture, the husband and wife are united for the first time on the 4th night after marriage. Before that, they are prohibited from even touching each other. This increases the eagerness for union and ignites the desire. Before their physical union, some rituals involving offering ghee in fire with recitation of 8 mantras seeking blessings from *Agnih* is performed. For this reason, the heat principle associated with this is called '*SHIKHI*', which literally means glowing flame (*Agnijwala*) and also dream (शीङ्गस्वप्ने). After this, the husband recites a mantra telling the wife to forget all negative aspects related to her past. Then the husband offers special sweets (*Sthalepakam*) to the wife seeking their total union with life, breath, bones, flesh and skins, so that they become totally fused into one stable unity. For this reason, the heating principle is also called '*DHRUTIH*'.

When the couple settle down with their own separate room and fire place, it is called '*Avasathyah*'(आवसन्ति आगत्य वसन्ति अस्मिन् वा). With this fire they conduct their daily rituals. The fire associated with such process is called '*BHAVAH*'. Since this fire is specially created for this purpose (भूयते इति भवत्यस्मादिति वा, भू +अपादाने अप्), it is so called.

After the sacrificial fire is set up, each couple is expected to perform five rituals (Devayajnah, Pitruyajnah, Manushyayajnah, Bhutayajnah, Brahmayajnah) to not only help keep the environment clean and hygienic, but also repay the debt (ऋण) of our ancestors and all forms of divinity, as well as self-development. These are

included in a ritual called ‘*Vaiswadevah*’. The fire associate with these rituals is called ‘*PAVAKAH*’, because it not only purifies the environment, but also self.

The heating principle *AGNI* is described in its three aspects in the Vedas (एकस्त्रेधा विहितो जातवेदः – Atharvaveda-18.4.11. They are: (1) the fire in the eastern side in a square pit – ‘*AHAVANEYAGNIH*’, (2) the fire in the western side in a circular pit – ‘*GARHAPATYAGNIH*’, (3) the fire in the south-western side in a semicircular pit like D – ‘*DAKSHINAGNIH*’. respectively (पूर्वो अग्निष्टवातपतु शंपुरस्ताच्छंपश्चात्तपतु गार्हपत्यः। दक्षिणाग्निष्टे तपतु शर्मवर्मात्तरतो मध्यतो.... Atharvaveda-18.4.9). ‘*GARHAPATYAGNIH*’ is the normal fire continuously maintained in the household. This is called ‘*BHOUMAH*’ in Ayurveda, which is the latent heat in everything. Since this is the base (*Pratistha*) for other *AGNIH*, it is called *BRAHMA*. The other two are generated through special processes. The first –‘*AHAVANEYANIH*’, is called ‘*Jatharam*’ (जटति एकत्री भवतीति) or ‘*Jatharah*’ (जायते गर्भमलं वा अस्मिन्निति) in Ayurveda, which is used in chemical reactions. This is radioactive. Hence, it is called *Rudra* (*Eswarah*), because of its destructive potential (*Ghoratanuh*). The third *DAKSHINAGNIH* is called ‘*DIVYAH*’ in Ayurveda. After certain point, *AHAVANEYAGNIH* reverses the direction as in the proton-neutron conversion. Then it is called *Nutana Garhapatyah* and the earlier *Garhapatyah* is called ‘*Purana Garhapatyah*’. Since it helps in producing molecules in different combinations to sustain everything, it is called ‘*VISHNUH*’. During ‘*Agnihotra*’, all three types of heat (त्रयोऽग्नयः) are used.

The process of controlled reaction in a designated field by introduction, control and extinction of necessary ingredients is called ‘*Homah*’.

(विशिष्टदेशावच्छिन्नप्रक्षेपोपहितत्यागः - हुदानादुनयोः। प्रीणनेऽपीति।). One variety of ‘*Homah*’ is called *Lakshahomah*, where parts of the primordial heat is invoked (पिटरः पतंगः स्वर्णस्त्वगाधोभ्राजः एव च।). The heat principle associated with it is called ‘*VANHIH*’ because it not only carries these types of heat for nuclear reactions (बहति धरति हव्यं देवार्थमिति), but also helps in their interaction (ते जातवेदसः सर्वे कल्माषः कुसुमस्तथा। दहनः शोषणञ्चैवतर्पणश्चमहाबलः।). In a bigger variety of *Homah* called ‘*Kotihomah*’, the associated heat principle is called ‘*HUTASHANAH*’ because of its overreach (हुतम् आहुतद्रव्यम् अशनमस्य).

For rectification of some defects, the action taken is called ‘*Prayaschittam*’. It is not only mental repentance, but also includes some physical operations to satisfy the mental state (प्रायं पापं समुद्दिष्टं चित्तं तस्य विशेषधनम्। यत्तपः प्रभृतिकं कर्म उपचितं सञ्चितमशुभं पापं नाशयतीति कृततत्त्वकर्मभिः कर्तुः प्रयतत्वादवाशुद्धत्वादेव प्रायश्चित्तम्।). Since all actions are associated with heat, and since different actions have to be performed to rectify different mistakes, the heat principle to be used in each case will be different according to the necessity. Since it has to follow the prescribed procedure in each case, the different heating principles are commonly named ‘*Vidhih*’ (विधँ विधाने), which literally means the prescribed procedure.

The word ‘Yajnah’ is generally misunderstood and treated as a synonym for ‘Homah’, which is wrong. ‘Yajnah’ means a chemical reaction with necessary ingredients to produce the desired result (यज्ञं देवपूजासङ्गतिकरणदृनेषु). *Yajnah* has two different categories: *Somayajnah* and *Chayanayajnah*. Of these, *Somayajnah* has three categories: सप्तसुत्याः सप्तचपाकयज्ञाः हविर्यज्ञाः सप्ततथैकविंशतिः (Gopathabrahmanam-5- 25) – there are 7 types of ‘Sutyah’, 7 types of *Pakayajnah*, and 7 types of *Haviryajnah*.

The word ‘Devah’ in Vedas is used for five different purposes. In some cases, it is used for the constituent quantum particles of the universe, as in चित्रं देवानामुदगादनीकम् (Rig.1-115-1), तत्सूर्यस्य देवत्वं तन्महित्वम् (Rig.1-115-4) | त्वमिमा ओषधीः सोम ... त्वं ज्योतिषा वितमो ववर्थ (S.V. 604) | अग्निर्जागरतमयं सोम आहतवाहमस्मिसख्येन्योकाः (Rig. 5-45-15) | इन्द्रश्च विष्णो यदपस्पृथेथां त्रेधा सहसं वितदैरयेथाम् (Rik 6-69-8) etc. In other cases, it may mean the self-luminous bodies, as in अग्निर्नः पातु कृतिकाः नक्षत्रं देवमिन्द्रियम्।, यत्ते नक्षत्रं मृगशीर्षमस्ति।, आर्द्रया रुद्रः प्रथमा न एति।, बृहष्पतिःप्रथमं जायमानः, etc.

Here, the word देवाः stand for quantum particles that always interact with each other. The word हव्य stands for interaction (हुदानादानयोः।आदाने चेत्येके). Thus. the carrier force that induces interaction between quantum particles is called *HAVYAVAHANA*.

Agni responsible for good health or wealth is *BALADAH*, to involve in undesirable deeds is *KRODHAH*, possessive nature is *KAMADAH*, forest fires is *DUTAKAH*, digestion of food in stomach is *JATHARAH*. *Agni* used in last rites is *KRAVYAH*, found in ocean is *VADAVAH*, and *agni causing total destruction (PRALAYA)* is called *SAMVARTAKAH*.

TO SUMMARIZE:

Agnis with different characteristics are invoked using different names depending on *samskara karma* (संस्कारकर्मः) being performed. Various forms of *Agnis* are described here with their usefulness in *karmas* and their benefits, just like a particular thing in society is used in different forms by people with different habits. Also, like a single man assuming the charge of a son, brother, husband, father and in laws. This is just an attempt to give an insight to the various forms of *AGNIs* with their usage and benefits, as described in Vedas.